

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee

My name is Gary E Hall. I have lived on a forest homestead west of Olney for 30 years. I love my forest home that I live in, play in and work in. I enjoy my land by carefully using it. Over that time I have seen my access to the public forest cut by three fourths and the timber industry that I worked in for 19 years destroyed and the overall health of the forest decline.. All because of excessive environmental protectionism

HJ 31 will send a message to Congress that Montana does not want the giant wilderness bill known as the Rockies Prosperity Act in the last Congress. This bill has been introduced in every Congress since the 102nd in 1992 and is scheduled to be introduced again. It started with 4 sponsors in 1992 and had 187 in the last session. With the makeup of this Congress it has the best chance ever of passing.

This wilderness bill would triple the wilderness and National Park acreage in the three states of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho. It will add almost a million acres of wilderness in just the Kootenai and Flathead forests alone. It will also set aside the entire North Fork of the Flathead west of Glacier Park for consideration as a new National Park. In addition to new Wilderness and National Parks this bill will

1. lock up 2000 miles of our rivers in Wild and Scenic designations;
2. add use restrictions to millions of acres for wildland recovery so they can be added to the wilderness acreages at a later date. This includes over 300,000 acres on the Flathead and Kootenai Forests
3. further use restrictions on hundreds of thousands of acres in "biological diversity corridors" including almost 100,000 acres of this type on the Kootenai alone.
4. it names the Society For Biological Diversity as a consultant for the panel that selects final boundaries of the new wilderness areas. SBD is the organization that conceived and still promotes the Wildland Project which according to their own documents would move 50% of the entire U. S. landmass into wilderness or semi-wilderness status.
5. impact all national forests in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho

This bill would virtually eliminate the timber industry in Montana. It will severely cut back the recreation industry especially our snowmobiling which attracts a large number of winter tourists.

Environmentalists have made a persistent argument that wilderness and roadless areas help our economy. They claim that the influx of upper scale new residents bringing fresh dollars into Montana is a result of these environmental amenities. There are two major flaws in their logic.

While there is an influx of new money coming in, very little of it gets to the blue collar, working on the land, traditional Montanan. In fact these folks have been devastated by the lawsuits and lobbying of environmental activists. As you know Montana has the lowest per capita wage in the Nation.

The other flaw in their logic is that this influx of new money is brought in by wilderness and other restrictions on the traditional uses that Montanans formerly enjoyed. Glacier Park, Flathead Lake and Big Mountain Ski Area were attracting visitors and new residents to my part of Montana long before the collapse of the timber industry and the wholesale closure of roads caused by extreme environmental protectionism beginning in the late 80s.

We took good care of the land because we love it. It is our home, our playground and our workplace. They came and liked what they saw and they stayed. The theory that they come because of the recent restrictions has never been tested and it can't be.

Very few people, new residents or old, travel the backcountry anymore because it is just too hard to get there. According to a federal study only 1.7% of all Flathead Forest visitors go into the wilderness. So how does a forest that is mostly very difficult to visit or even see up close attract new residents or tourists. People want to USE these lands. It is not enough to just know that they are there. Newcomers to my area come because they want to ski, boat, camp, drive, picnic, snowmobile as well as hike in these areas. They want to use the land.

This giant wilderness sponsored by uninformed eastern lawmakers will not be good for Montana. We need to oppose it in every way we can. HJ 31 is one way to do that.

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Pres Fred Hodgeboom
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Honorable Greg Lind, Chairman, and Members of the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee:

HJ31 deserves your support to send a strong message to eastern Congressional Representatives that the Bill if passed would destroy the economy of Montana and ultimately result in more catastrophic fires destroying our healthy watersheds' productivity and all the natural resources they produce that people treasure. As you know, we are already experiencing this destruction from fires blown out of our existing overgrown high hazard Parks, wildernesses, and roadless areas as well as areas allegedly designated for multiple use but have suffered from lack of access and management under the last 20 years of Forest Service do nothing "protection". The last thing Montana and the Nation needs is more wilderness and unproductive "corridors" connecting them, thus targeting private land to be taken off the tax rolls. When a Federal Bill such as this becomes law that targets private land for "protection", we know that Federal Agencies such as USDI Park Service, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, and USDA Forest Service working in concert with multi-million dollar non-government organizations, such as the Nature Conservancy supported by tax write-offs, all work to acquire or encumber those lands to reduce or eliminate productivity and tax base.

Proposed Federal Bill HR 1204 is an outrageous attack on western heritage, custom and culture, and quality of life by uninformed Eastern Congressmen. The Bill has practically no sponsors from western states. US Department of Commerce data that shows Montana is last or next to last in the Nation for average annual wage per job for several years, ever since Montana has become a tourism economy as natural resource jobs have dwindled. A recent article in the Kalispell Daily Inter Lake reported that 30% of Montana jobs do not pay enough to support a single person, and 80% of Montana jobs do not pay enough to support a family of two children.

The claims made by proponents of HR 1204 are ridiculous--good paying jobs obliterating roads? Those jobs would last maybe three months and the land is permanently out of production and doomed to burn. The result of the proposed wilderness bill would simply eliminate more of the few good paying jobs left in Montana's natural resource industries, when access to Federal Forests is further reduced from the current inadequate levels. Less than two percent of total National Forests visits use the existing wildernesses.

Please work to preserve Montana's watersheds and natural resources by not condemning millions more acres to destructive wildfires while maintaining Montana few good pay jobs in our economy.

Please approve HJ 31.

Respectfully,

Fred D. Hodgeboom, President
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